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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, here it is, just about the beginning of March, finally! We can almost start to feel the weather changing for the better here in New England. It's been one helluva winter! The good news is that the snowfall totals didn't reach the predicted levels, fortunately. But, the cold temperatures more than made up for that. However, we've managed to reach some more seasonal temperatures this past week. Enough so that I've been receiving numerous gardening seed and bulb catalogs that have me looking at them more fervently the past few days. Spring is just around the corner.

I had to take today off as a "mental health" day. I actually took yesterday off also because my wife had to have test performed and I needed to drive her in and back due to the nature of the test (results were good!). But I needed a full day to just unwind. This past few weeks, we've been putting together performance appraisals for our staff, and that always seems to be a stressful period around here. This year was definitely better then past years - fewer people nitpicking over various comments or evaluations. I don't know why this task always seems to be stressful, but it always does. But, it's over for another year! I think it's time for a celebration.

Until next time...

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New Beta of Tempus-Word NG

A new Beta of Tempus-Word NG (V5.22ß) is available:

http://www.tempus-word.de/en/download/index.htm

Please note, that you can choose a small update-file instead of the full install.

The description of the keyboard shortcuts is available in a separate file (on the same page, see "Shortcut-Manual")

Major changes:

- First release of adjusted English keyboard reference
  (documentation and keyboard-driver TWKEYUK.TAS)

- Smarter looking skin (3D-buttons in the information
  panels)

- Accessing of several dialogs with shortcuts improved
  (replacement of multiple used characters)

- Preparations for the coming version of ST-Emulator Runtime
  (English)

Please tell us your impressions of the new release in our forum (now English skin available with this link):

http://49743.rapidforum.com/selskin=i1

Norbert Simon
Tempus-Word Project

Game 'Space Battle' by Paradize Released

Paradize proudly releases our first 2004 production.

A small two player game called "Space Battle" featuring a vector rotator in GFA BASIC. The game offers an AI mode and optional joystick control.

It should run on STFM, STe, Falcon 030 and TT in normal TOS.

URL: http://paradize.atari.org/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. It's gonna be short and sweet this week. Well, more short than sweet, but you get the idea.

I don't remember if I've mentioned this before, but I've got a herniated disc and minor arthritis in my neck. I've had it for quite a while now, and I originally thought it was 'just a stiff neck'. I attributed it to stress due to things in my personal life, but when the stress lessened and the pain didn't, I finally got it checked. That's when the doctor gave me the news.

Now, I don't want to give the impression that I'm an invalid or that I'm

in an incredible amount of pain. That's simply not the case. But it IS quite annoying and I'm finding that I have to change certain things. I'm getting physical therapy to try to minimize the problem, and I'm hoping for a full recovery.

Anyway, that's why my intro is short this week and probably why I haven't got anything either deep or annoying to say (I find that I make a point best when I'm both somewhat deep and somewhat annoying. The exact percentage and degree of each keeps changing, but that's the general formula.)

By the way, I don't usually do this, but I ran across a story on the 'net about Jeff Minter... remember Llamasoft? You can check it out here: http://www.wayoftherodent.com/bob_yak2.htm

Well, let's get to the news and stuff from the UseNEt.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
==========

'Sam F' asks for help with his hard drive:

"Hellllpppppppppp!! My scsi cd is last device. I have the sci terminator 'plug', and the scsi cable. 2 ports on back of external case. Which port does the cable go to and which does the terminator plug go to?"

Dave Glish tells Sam:

"If you are going from the SCSI controller to an external device (with 2 SCSI plugs on the back) you can plug the cable into either plug and the terminator into the other. SCSI needs termination at the end of both an internal chain and an external chain. The second plug on the external device allows you to either terminate or daisy chain another device onto the external chain. Hope this helps."

Sam tells Dave:

"Helps a great deal Dave, now I just need to get either a working scsi cdrw, or re-case my Falcon and get an IDE cdrw."

Dave replies:

"They are getting hard to find. If you have any second-hand type computer stores in your area you could try there."

Edward Baiz jumps in and posts:

"Actually the drive can be terminated with the SCSI terminator plug. Just read it's manual."

'Jon' adds:

"I have a similar setup and it doesn't matter where you plug the cable as long as it is terminated on the other end."

Neil Chester asks for help setting up STiK2:

"I have managed to use Stik2 without trouble with my Freeserve address but the amount of junk emails is driving me to distraction, so much so that I am trying to migrate to my other ISP accounts, with UKFantastic and FreeOla. All 3 were a breeze to setup on Iconnect. But with Stik2 only Freeserve and UKFantastic connect correctly.

FreeOla fails on PPP connection, can anyone help me on this? Or provide some pointers as to what to look for as I seem to have put the Username and Password correctly into the CFG file.

Unless there are some TCP settings to change I am fairly clueless as to why Iconnect should work OK and yet Stik2 fails on the first hurdle."

Derryck Croker tells Neil that he has....

"Only the usual advice on connecting using a terminal such as Connect! and manually entering your details to see if you can start a PPP connection.

Usually you don't need any scripts at all, so make sure that your StiK2 setup matches what's set in IConf (there, the startup script dialog should be empty aside from "Done" IIRC.

Why do you want to move away from IConnect and its clients, by the way?"

Neil tells Derryck:

"Seems odd that Iconnect should work but not Stik2 as all you have to put in is the passwords and usernames and the Tel No. I noticed that my username for the email address has a -001 after it, so I didn't use that bit for the login on Stik2. This one is used in Newsie.

I haven't done a script in Stik2, as I was relying on PAP etc. But I may try it with this one (if I'm desperate). I haven't used Connect before are there instructions for using it somewhere?

I am tempted to use Iconnect for the UKFantastic and FreeOla accounts but I am worried that they will get overloaded with junk emails eventually like this Freeserve account! I use Stik2 with Newsie to use "Get Selected Emails" option in Newsie to delete off the server the 150 rubbish emails I get every 2 days!! Emailer wasn't very good for doing this as it didn't display the header line for them, so I ended up deleting genuine ones!

If there was a POPGEM client for Iconnect then that would suffice? But actually the Web access with Dan's OVL is far faster than Iconnects which is welcome."

Derryck adds:

"You might take a look at MagxNet instead. It's fairly complex to set up, but there was a thread in here some time back that had a step by step. If you ask Vassilis nicely you could have an IConnect gateway to go along with

the GlueStik supplied with it, and then you can freely mix and match

It’s faster than the other stacks as well, in my humble opinion.,

John Oakes asks about re-casing his TT030:

"Are there details on recasing a TT030 into a desktop case."

Janez Valant gets cute and tells John:

"Hm, TT _IS_ in a desktop case. <grin>"

John tells Janez:

"True. I would like to try and contain my cd player and my 4gb scsi barracuda ethernec card, etc, etc, etc."

Greg Goodwin adds:

"Something you might want to consider is to put your items into a 4 bay SCSI case. Then you would have just two ’boxes’."

Dave Glish adds some info about good old fashioned PC-style cases:

"If you want to use a standard PC type case, look for an older style "AT" type of case. The newer "ATX" type power button connects to the motherboard and you need to do some extra wiring to make it work with an Atari. The "AT" just turns the computer on or off. I cased an older MegaST and it works great. Put an internal ICD SCSI adapter in it and have it hooked up to a hard drive and CDrom. I also did something a little different. Since the SCSI adapter is all internal I brought the last SCSI plug on my cable to the back of the machine and attached it to an external SCSI adapter type plug. Now I can use an external terminator or take it off and add external devices on to the chain."

Philippe Cousson joins the growing number of people who want to network their Falcons and posts:

"I’d like to tie may falcon to an ethernet network (microsoft client). Is it possible ? How is it done?"

Maurits van de Kamp tells Philippe:

"Yep. Use an ethernec adapter (http://hardware.atari.org) to connect it to the ethernet. As for Microsoft networking, you’ll need Samba. I’m not sure if Magicnet or STiK/STiNG support that, but MiNTnet does."

StØphane Smirnow asks about the availability of games for the ST:

"After more than 12 years in a box, I decided to give a second life to my old Atari 1040 ST...when I discovered that half of my disks haven’t

survived the "time travel". So I'm looking to buy (again) some original games from that time (+-1990). Would anyone have any idea where I could find some (I'm located in Belgium, if that could be of any use)?"

John Miskinis tells StØphane:

"Well, I'm in the USA, but would be happy to "restore" any of your games that I own, and that still work. I have not powered on my ST in a couple years, but will soon, if I can get a working HD system from the pieces I have.

If you make a list of what games no longer work, maybe others and myself can help you..."

StØphane replies:

"thank you very much for your answer. Actually I seem to have more luck than you, as I still have my internet AND external drive perfectly working
About the original games I'm looking for (and should I say that I'm prepared to pay well for them!), here is the very important one I'd like to retrieve (in importance order):
-Dragonflight (from Thalion, 1990)
-Ring of Medusa (army-control game, but don't know the editor nor the release year (probably around 1990 also))
-Captive
-Dragon Breath
-Dungeon Master (of course) and Chaos Strikes Back
-Drakken
-Full Metal Planet
If you have any news about those original games (still working of course), or if you have one yourself (and would like to sell it for a good price), please contact me!"

Alesander Holland tells StØphane:

"Dragonflight (from Thalion, 1990)

http://thalion.atari.org

Dragonflight is going to be released soon as Udo Fischer, original author is going to produce a non-copy protected version which also runs from hard disk.

Dungeon Master (of course) and Chaos Strikes Back

Dungeon Master and Chaos Strikes Back even

http://dmweb.free.fr "

Nick Harlow adds:

"Check out this web shop for ST games ... both shrink wrapped (new) and second-hand.   http://www.1632-sales.zenwebhosting.com/acatalog/   "

Mark Bedingfield asks about a PC emulator for the Falcon:

"I just picked up a Falcon speed 286 card and was wondering if anybody had a copy of the install disk floating around? I know it is ancient but what the hell, it's worth playing with. Just like the idea of a dos prompt on my desktop. Also I seem to recall it was possible to get win 3.11 to work in 256 colour mode in a later version of the software, is this correct?"

Greg Goodwin tells Mark:

"I don't have the details of Falcon speed I fear, but I've discovered that SoftPC is compatible with the CT60. 66Mhz 286 anyone?"

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony PSP Delayed Until 2005!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Smaller Publishers Pressure!
                                    Beyond the Joystick!
                                    And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Sony Delays U.S. Launch of PSP Game Device to 2005

Japan's Sony Corp. on Wednesday said it has pushed back the U.S. launch of its all-in-one handheld gaming device called PSP until early in 2005, from its original planned launch date in late 2004.

Sony, one of the world's largest consumer electronics makers, said the portable version of its best-selling PlayStation game machine, which is anticipated to include a digital music and video player, will still be released in Japan in 2004.

Sony Computer Entertainment of America spokeswoman Molly Smith said that Sony was now looking to launch the PSP in North America by the end of the company's next fiscal year, which ends in March 2005.

"So, basically, the U.S. launch is scheduled the quarter following the Japanese Launch," said Smith, who confirmed that the Japan launch was on track for the year-end holiday season of 2004.

Sony said that it wanted to make sure that the PSP would launch along with enough games to drives sales.

"We want to ensure that the product launch is really well supported and that the development community will have time to optimize content," Smith said, "The portable space is a new domain ... and we want to ensure that when this thing is launched that we are able to demonstrate what this thing can do."

The PSP, which in a prototype featured a bright, 4.5 inch (11.4 cm) color screen, sports the familiar box, circle, cross and triangle buttons of the PlayStation controllers.

Analysts have seen the PSP as a potential rival to Nintendo Co. Ltd.’s dominant Game Boy handheld player, Nokia’s N-Gage wireless gaming device and Apple Computer Inc.’s iPod and iTunes music download service.

"It’s not all that big of a surprise," said Stewart Halpern, analyst at RBC Capital Markets. "It doesn’t really do a lot of good to put the platform out there if you don’t have a sufficient amount of software."

Halpern noted that Sony development kits, which game developers need to create games for the PSP, had been delivered late, leading to the PSP’s delayed launch date.

The PlayStation 2, which launched in Japan in March 2000 and in North America in October 2000, was besieged with production problems when it first launched.

Smaller Video Game Publishers Under Pressure

For the smallest U.S. video game publishers there is bad news and worse: it is getting harder and more expensive to reach game buyers, and harder still to reach potential investors to stay afloat.

As the $10 billion games business becomes increasingly competitive and games grow more expensive to produce and market, analysts following the industry say smaller publishers are trying to just hang on while their larger rivals use their earnings power to buy up rights to the hottest games.

"I would say there’s not strategic interest" in the smallest players, said one investment banker who has worked on deals involving game publishers of various sizes. "None of these guys are even on the page."

Last week Acclaim Entertainment Inc. sold $15 million in convertible notes backed by a second mortgage on its headquarters, having already received an amendment to its credit agreement in December allowing it to borrow additional funds through the end of April.

The company’s auditors have for years questioned its ability to continue as a "going concern," and Electronic Arts Inc., the world’s largest game publisher, recently picked up the rights to publish future versions of

"Burnout," the racing game that had been Acclaim’s top franchise.

Bam Entertainment Inc. has fared little better, disclosing recently that it has failed to repay a $250,000 promissory note from one of its directors, and that its deal to acquire Scottish developer VIS is contingent on raising more than $12 million in new capital.

The company said in its quarterly report that it needs to raise new capital and that it may not have sufficient funds for operations for more than the next six months.

Interplay Entertainment Corp. is also in a similar predicament. In its September quarter, the last period the company publicly reported, it had net revenue of $4.7 million and a loss of $2.2 million, with a stockholders’ deficit of almost $16 million.

According to Reuters Research, a unit of Reuters Group Plc, there are no financial analysts covering Bam or Interplay, and just five following Acclaim, all of whom rate it "hold" or lower.

One who follows Acclaim said there were no strong prospects on its upcoming release schedule, leaving it at a disadvantage.

"In our view, the company is not in a good position to capitalize on the growth trends that we expect for video game software in 2004 and beyond," Harris Nesbitt Gerard analyst Edward Williams said in a note.

The smaller publishers have struggled to gain market share, and with the exception of Interplay’s "Baldur’s Gate: Dark Alliance 2," which was a top-10 title in January, they have struggled to make an impact on the sales charts.

"It’s a vicious cycle," said Dan "Shoe" Hsu, editor-in-chief of leading games magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly. Small publishers, he said, have difficulty attracting attention for their games, which hurts sales, which leaves them with less money to promote their titles.

"Part of the problem there is these guys are trying to bring out games during the holiday season with the mind-set that holiday sales mean more sales no matter what," he said.

Another important factor, Hsu said, was having the capital for art direction, given the increasing premium put on cutting-edge graphics.

"If a game looks really good ... it does really change your perception," he said. "You can make the exact same game, but if one company can make it look better then they sell more products."

Researchers, Game Makers Go Past Joystick

There’s not much use for a keyboard or joystick in the video game "The Journey to Wild Divine: The Passage." All the action is controlled, literally, through your fingertips.

You can dump the game pad with Sony Corp.’s EyeToy, too. You’ll succeed only by prancing around in front of a video camera.

Increasingly, game makers and researchers are offering alternatives to the joystick with products that listen to your voice, watch your movement and even monitor your pulse.

The hope is these devices, which tout everything from better health to inner peace, will lure people who wouldn’t ordinarily consider video games.

"What we’re seeing is graphics have gotten better and better in games, but the input hasn’t really improved," EyeToy inventor Richard Marks said.

Video game makers have long attempted an alternative spin.

During the 1980s, target practice games like Nintendo’s "Duck Hunt" included the "Zapper Light Gun," which had to be aimed at just the right part of the television screen to blast away ducks and clay pigeons.

Later, the Japanese game "Dance Dance Revolution" had breathless dancers spinning, jumping and tapping their feet on a plastic dance mat.

But for the most part, these alternative input devices were just heavily modified keyboards, joysticks or mice, said Kurt Smith, one of the creators of "Wild Divine."

"Wild Divine" and a few others are fundamentally different. There are no keyboards to press or mouse buttons to click.

With "Wild Divine," players attach three plastic biofeedback clips called Magic Rings to a small device that plugs into the computer’s Universal Serial Bus port.

The $160 game, attachments included, monitors a player’s heart rate and perspiration. Users who enter the game’s decidedly new-age setting must accomplish a series of tasks, such as juggling balls, by trying to relax and thereby lowering their heart rate. Tense up and the balls will drop.

Mastering the game means learning how to control your breathing and to cycle between emotional states of excitement and relaxation.

"We’re able to keep a really close eye on what’s going on in your body," said Smith, who spent 15 years in the health care industry before forming his company, The Wild Divine Project. "They’re pretty flabbergasted that ‘Oh my God, I’m really controlling this with my mind.’"

In the upcoming "Lifeline" from Konami of America Inc., players shout commands into a microphone to direct their on-screen persona. Creators say the game will respond to a lexicon of 5,000 words and about 100,000 phrases like "dodge and reload."

Powergrid Fitness, based in Laurel, Md., is taking a heart-friendly approach with its $695 kiloWatt controller. Due in June, it resembles a fitness machine and works with existing video games on the PlayStation 2, Xbox and Windows-based computers.

In a racing game, for example, the harder players push on the kiloWatt’s mounted controller, the faster the race car will go.

"Video games are addictive," co-founder Greg Merril said. "To be able to leverage that addiction in a healthy way was a very compelling idea for us."

Sony’s $50 EyeToy camera, first released last year in Europe, records a player’s movement and translates it into action on screen.

Most EyeToy games are simple diversions that last only a few minutes, such as "Keep Ups," where you have to keep moving around carefully to bobble a soccer ball on your head.

Ultimately, these gaming devices have potential applications beyond entertainment.

Smith foresees adapting special software expansion packs for his "Wild Divine" game to manage pain or quit smoking.

Researchers at Sandia National Laboratories’ Advanced Concepts Group recently began using games to gauge reaction to stress, boredom and other psychological situations.

In their test, four people playing the tense military game "Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield" were hooked up to off-the-shelf parts: accelerometers to measure motion, face-recognition software, EKGs to measure heart beat and a respiration monitor to measure breathing depth and rapidity.

Sandia officials believe their ongoing analysis will show a correlation between the physical feedback and a person’s feelings. However, the $200,000 research project remains preliminary, and they have yet to draw any conclusions.

Lead researcher Peter Merkle said computers, despite their power, are still bad at recognizing humans’ complex physical and emotional patterns.

"We give off so much information, but our only current way of interacting with a computer is very limited - through, essentially, a keyboard and mouse," he said.

Avid gamer Stephen Smith, 15, of Four Oaks, N.C., said the EyeToy is fun, but he’s not about to toss his joystick just yet.

"It has potential, but it gets boring after a while," he said. "I think that products like EyeToy show us what the future of gaming could be like. ... It lets you interact with a game that stars you."

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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JagFest’04 UK

WHAT

A second festival of Atari featuring Jaguar, Lynx and ST, TT and Falcon.. Here you will be able to play all the great Jaguar games, link your Lynx’s

and show off those ST's/Falcons. We want to include as many of you as possible, and this time we have more room, well 1 more actually. There will be dedicated Jaguar, Atari Computer, and 8 Bit areas.

Do you have a pet project on Atari, then come and show it off, do you want to play games then we plan to have at least 4 video screens available for Jaguar games not including the tournaments and people showing what their Jaguars do.

You want to trade/swap some of Jaguar/Lynx or Atari software? Brilliant, this is going to be the place to do it. 16/32 Systems will obviously provide some of the retail but if you've got it come along and do it.

Do you run or are you part of an Atari group, then you should be here! If you are a company or group and what to support us by giving a prize for one of our Tournaments, let us know!!

When

June 12/13 2004 - Setup and Start for Attendees on the Friday 11th June Afternoon late into the night
Opening Hours 10am - 6pm for Visitors
ALL DAY AND ALL NIGHT FOR WEEKEND PASS HOLDERS!! (massive game sessions!!)

Where

Medway Manor Hotel, Rochester Kent UK
More details can be found at http://www.uk.jagfest.org.uk/
Discussion web pages can be found at http://bbs.jagfest.org.uk/phpBB2/

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Nick Harlow
16/32 Systems
Webshop: http://www.1632-sales.zenwebhosting.com/acatalog/
Web Site: http://www.1632systems.co.uk

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Governors Press for Limits on Internet Tax Ban

Several U.S. governors said Monday they would seek to scale back a congressional effort to ban taxes on Internet access, saying it would cost them billions of dollars in annual revenue.

At a conference in Washington, three U.S. governors said their budgets could be devastated by a bill that would prevent them from taxing the monthly fees that Internet providers like EarthLink Inc. charge customers.

Though few states currently tax Internet access, the bill could end up

eating into revenues from telephone service, music sales and other activities that are already migrating to the Internet and could be bundled with access fees in the future, they said.

The bill amounts to "putting a federal stop sign onto a state road," said Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a Republican.

Huckabee was joined by Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle and Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, both Democrats, who said the ban could force them to raise other taxes and fees.

A better approach would be to simply extend the more limited, temporary ban that expired last year so policymakers can figure out how to handle new services like Internet telephony, they said.

Congress sought to make a temporary ban on access taxes permanent last year and widen it to include high-speed cable and DSL service.

That version, backed by a long list of business groups, would also eliminate access taxes that were in place in some states before the temporary ban first took effect in 1998.

The bill passed the House of Representatives last year but stalled in the Senate, and the temporary ban expired in October.

Aides said any action in the Senate was unlikely for several weeks.

Two former governors now serving in the Senate, Tennessee Republican Lamar Alexander and Delaware Democrat Tom Carper, said they were picking up support for a renewal of the temporary ban.

Virginia Sen. George Allen, a sponsor of the permanent tax ban, would be willing to consider ways to focus the ban exclusively on access fees, an aide said.

But opponents are seeking to make the issue more complicated than it needs to be, said Allen aide Heidi Frederickson.

"This is an issue that deals with consumers, and that’s where Sen. Allen’s focus is," Frederickson said. "Sen. Alexander is clearly focused on the governors, as this press conference today reveals."

Latest MyDoom Outbreak Spreading, Deletes Files

Security experts issued fresh alerts over a new, file-deleting version of the MyDoom e-mail worm that was targeting computer users with greater ferocity on Wednesday.

The new outbreak, known as MyDoom.F, emerged late last week and has been gathering steam ever since.

The virus is programmed to infect personal computers and use them to unleash a crippling digital barrage known as a denial-of-service attack on select Web sites belonging to Microsoft Corp. and the Recording Industry Association of America.

The attacks failed to bring down the sites, though access to the Web site

for the RIAA was hampered slightly on Wednesday, security firms reported. The RIAA, a lobbying group for the music industry, has drawn the ire of computer users since it began suing American online song swappers last year.

While it was not spreading as fast as its MyDoom predecessors nor as rapidly as last week's Netsky.B outbreak, MyDoom.F is considered a growing risk as it deletes random Microsoft Word and Excel files, plus photos and movies stored on an infected computer.

"MyDoom.F has been picking up pace since Monday and Tuesday," said Mikko Hypponen, manager of Finnish anti-virus research firm F-Secure. "The disturbing thing is that it has a destructive payload. We haven't seen a destructive virus like this in a while," he said.

Computer viruses rarely destroy files these days. They have instead evolved over the years to turn unsecured computers into "zombie" machines capable of carrying out the virus writer's commands.

Typically, this army of commandeered machines is used to send out torrents of e-mail spam messages, unleash digital attacks on targeted Web sites and, in some cases, host Web sites that sell everything from vitamins to pornography.

The first MyDoom worm surfaced in January and is considered the most virulent outbreak ever, infecting millions of computers around the globe.

Security firms were again advising computer users not to open mysterious-looking emails or click on their attachments if they are not certain of the sender's identity.

The latest outbreak arrives in e-mail in-boxes carrying a variety of subject header lines including: "Approved," "Your Credit Card" and "You use illegal File Sharing...Your IP was logged."

Anti-Spyware Law Proposed

A handful of tech-savvy senators are tackling the growing problem of spyware with a proposed law that would make it harder for sites to inflict the invasive programs on unwitting users, and easier for the recipients to remove them.

The Software Principles Yielding Better Levels of Consumer Knowledge (SPYBLOCK) Act would "give consumers control over the programs that are downloaded onto their computers," says cosponsor Barbara Boxer (D-California). The measure was introduced Thursday by Boxer and Senators Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) and Conrad Burns (R-Montana).

The bill tackles three aspects of spyware. It imposes new rules that would make it more difficult for companies to slip software onto users' systems surreptitiously; require easy directions and options for removal; and prohibit harmful spyware.

Under the proposal, if a company needs a user to install certain software to view Web site components or advertising, it would have to explain the reason and nature of the download in a pop-up window or another clear notice. This explanation would remain on the computer screen until the user

either consents or declines to install the software. The act would make illegal the practice of downloading and installing software without alerting the user - a growing practice among some companies.

If a user decides to install that software, it must be easily removable, according to the legislation. The application must appear in the Add/Remove Programs menu; be completely removable using normal, reasonable procedures; and, if it is an advertisement, it must include a link that tells the user how to turn off the ad feature or uninstall the software.

Some spyware is nearly impossible to remove once installed.

"[Some] consumers have been downloading and saying that they can’t remove [the software]," says Ari Schwartz, associate director of the Center for Democracy and Technology. "Individuals should have the ability to enter into a contract and leave that contract if they want to."

The Federal Trade Commission and the state attorneys general would enforce the law, if enacted. However, some industry experts think more enforcement is needed.

Chris Hoofnagle, the associate director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, says consumers’ lack of legal rights on the spyware issue is a serious problem.

He criticizes the bill for not including a provision that lets individuals take legal action against spyware companies that stalk computer users.

"It’s a serious problem, because you want users in the enforcement loop," Hoofnagle says.

Schwartz agrees, saying enforcement needs to be improved and "the most effective piece that this bill can bring is more attention to this issue and greater enforcement for the worst practices out there."

Robert Bagnall, director of focused intelligence at IDefense, a Virginia-based security intelligence company, expresses concern over the international threat of spyware.

"The legitimate companies in the United States who currently place spyware [on retail computers] will have a tougher time doing it... but [legislation] will not help with the international factors at all," Bagnall says.

An anti-spyware bill has a good chance of passing Congress this session, Hoofnagle says. He cites the recent interest in cybersecurity as another boost. However, even legislation that sounds good can be eviscerated through "tinkering with definitions."

The proposed legislation follows a similar earlier effort, House Resolution 2929, introduced in July 2003 by Representative Mary Bono (D-California). That bill, which is still being debated at the committee level, also requires explicit user consent before the installation of software and orders enforcement by the FTC.

The bill introduced Thursday by Boxer, Burns, and Wyden is still in an early stage. It has not yet been assigned a number or been referred to committee, though it is expected to go to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, of which all three senators are members.

The FTC plans a workshop on spyware in mid-April.

Microsoft Set to Show Spam Strategy

Microsoft Chairman and Chief Software Architect Bill Gates will use the RSA Conference in San Francisco to unveil a proposed open technology standard that Microsoft hopes will make it harder to fake the source of unsolicited commercial e-mail.

On Tuesday, the company will release a specification for an antispam technology called Caller ID, a Microsoft-developed take on sender authentication technology that tries to validate the source address associated with an e-mail message, according to John Levine, co-chairman of the independent Antispam Research Group, part of the Internet Engineering Task Force.

A Microsoft spokesman could not confirm the information about Caller ID, but said that Gates will be talking about spam in a "variety of different contexts" in his keynote speech at the RSA security show, and that Microsoft's internal Anti-Spam Technology & Strategy Group will be making an announcement as well.

Sender authentication is rapidly gaining acceptance among e-mail experts and Internet service providers as a weapon in the fight against spam. On Monday, Sendmail announced that it will develop and distribute sender authentication technologies to its customers and the open source community to combat spam, viruses, and identity fraud in e-mail.

Sendmail will incorporate a "selection of sender authentication technologies" into its open source Mail Transfer Agent, including a technology called DomainKeys that is championed by Yahoo and "proposals put forward by Microsoft and others," Sendmail said. A Microsoft spokesman confirmed reports that the company will be releasing a sender authentication plug-in along with Sendmail.

Caller ID is akin to other sender authentication proposals circulating among leading ISPs and e-mail security experts, Levine said. In particular, it is similar to a nascent technology called Sender Policy Framework, developed by independent antispam researcher Meng Wong of e-mail forwarding service Pobox.com.

Instead of analyzing the content of messages to spot spam, the SPF protocol allows Internet domain administrators to describe their e-mail servers in an SPF record that is attached to the Domain Name System record using a special SPF description language. Other Internet domains can then reject any messages that claim to come from that domain but weren't sent from an approved server, Wong said.

Caller ID also relies on administrators adding lists of published e-mail servers to the DNS record for their Internet domains. Whereas SPF uses its own syntax for listing the domain addresses, Microsoft's Caller ID uses Extensible Markup Language to describe the valid e-mail servers, Levine said.

Also, SPF allows e-mail gateways to analyze the e-mail envelope, a wrapper for the message that is transferred between mail servers before the full message is sent. Messages that do not come from a valid server at the

domain are dropped before any message content is sent. In contrast, Caller ID analyzes the sender IP address information stored in the e-mail message header, which requires the whole message to be downloaded by the receiving e-mail server before it can be accepted or rejected, he said.

Microsoft has been developing Caller ID internally for the last year and consulting with antispam researchers in private for the last month, Wong and Levine said.

The Caller ID technology has both strong points and weaknesses, according to experts.

On the one hand, it requires mail servers to download the entire content of bogus messages before rejecting them, which could put a drag on e-mail servers. And, once it downloads a message, it only checks for it for the sender IP address, as opposed to running the message content through filters and other antispam tools, Levine said.

Caller ID also requires knowledge of XML, which makes implementation more complicated. And the added length of the XML content required by Caller ID may exceed the 512-character limit for response messages to DNS requests, Wong said.

According to the DNS specification, messages that exceed that limit require DNS information to be sent through a separate Transmission Control Protocol circuit, instead of using User Datagram Protocol. While that is technically possible, it is rarely used, introducing an element of uncertainty into the implementation of Caller ID, Wong and Levine said.

"This is a feature that has been specified for 25 years, but never used," Levine said.

However, the technology could do a better job of determining the actual source of an e-mail message than SPF, especially since envelope e-mail addresses don’t have to correspond to the e-mail header address, he said.

Microsoft’s dominance of the e-mail client market may allow it to extend sender authentication technology to smaller Internet domains and the masses of Internet users, Wong said.

Levine also supports the release of the Caller ID specification and Microsoft’s decision to develop Caller ID as an open standard.

"This is an important step. It’s the way you get standards to work. You have people pick at them, but implement them," he said.

Caller ID could eventually work alongside SPF, Domain Keys, and other sender authentication technologies, he said.

"Solving the spam problem is like curing cancer. It’s not one disease but 100 diseases, each with their own issues," he said.

AOL Blocks ICQ Worm

America Online has taken steps to stop the spread of a worm that began attacking ICQ instant messaging users this week.

The fix, which was implemented on Wednesday, was applied to ICQ's servers and does not require any action from ICQ users, according to an AOL spokesperson.

Virus researchers first detected the worm Tuesday. Dubbed "Bizex," the program spreads through instant-messaging exchanges, a less common method for viruses than e-mail transmission.

Kaspersky Labs, which initially disseminated information about the worm, notes that it only affected users running ICQ through the ICQ client application, not those tapping the ICQ network through outside applications such as Trillian. AOL says that only ICQ Pro users were affected. Those running other versions of ICQ, including ICQ Lite, were not vulnerable.

A spokesperson says AOL is working toward a solution for ICQ Pro users whose computers were affected and are now having trouble running ICQ. The company recommends that its users run and maintain antivirus software, she says.

Instant messaging is attracting increasing attention from those spreading malicious and deceptive applications. A virus-like game that installs a program to serve advertisements on a user's PC tore through the ranks of AOL Instant Messenger users earlier this month.

Apple Secures Mac OS X, Preps 'Panther' Update

Apple Computer Inc. this week released a security update to Mac OS X, beefing up a variety of system components for both client and server users. The release comes as the company primes Mac OS X 10.3.3, its third free update to the "Panther" OS, sources said.

Apple recommends that all Mac users download the security patch, which the Mac maker posted to its Web site on Monday. An update for the client version of Mac OS X 10.3, Panther, offers updates to IPSec, PPP, tcpdump and DiskArbitration; a variant for users of the older "Jaguar" release, Version 10.2, provides many of the same tweaks but also updates Safari, Apple's Web browser.

Security updates for the server releases of 10.3 and 10.2 update the same components as their client counterparts but also fine-tune QuickTime Streaming Server, according to Apple's Web site.

Apple is already looking ahead to the next minor update to Panther, which shipped Oct. 24 for $129 per user. Last week, the Cupertino, Calif., company provided developers with an advance seed of Version 10.3.3, which it designated build 7F32 of Mac OS X.

Mac OS X 10.3.3 will include updates to printing and USB, as well as changes to some of OS X's base components and frameworks-Cocoa, Carbon, graphics and imaging, Core OS, and the High Level Toolbox-sources said. The update will also include a variety of bug fixes for the Unix-based OS. Apple reportedly told developers to focus their testing efforts on the update's audio, graphics, USB and FireWire functionality.

Apple rolled out its last Panther update, Version 10.3.2, in December. The service release enhanced cross-platform file sharing, PostScript printing, font management and a variety of other OS X features.

Rumors Build over ’Windows XP Reloaded’

Speculation is rampant that Microsoft will be unable to maintain its grip on the OS market between now and the expected 2006 release of Longhorn and is planning to put out an interim version of Windows XP.

The company has denied this. It is clear, though, that something is underfoot at Microsoft to help it maintain its momentum - an effort reportedly dubbed "Windows XP Reloaded."

Microsoft already has announced it would release a service pack with better security measures this fall. Windows XP Reloaded appears to be separate from such a routine release.

Whether the current rumors are nothing more than a marketing ploy or, indeed, advance information on an interim release, it is clear that market forces are propelling Microsoft to take some kind of action. Linux is becoming a viable alternative to the desktop operating system, despite Microsoft’s 90-percent share of the market.

Also, Microsoft must take into account customers that have signed up for its enterprise agreements, or EAs, which often cover the Windows OS system.

"Many customers signed up for Microsoft’s enterprise agreement primarily to get new versions of covered products," a Gartner report points out. "Microsoft may need an interim version of the Windows client to deliver the value its customers thought they were buying."

Indeed, Gartner believes there is a good chance Microsoft will announce an interim version of Windows targeted for the second half of 2005. "If that happens, Longhorn will not be available until at least the second half of 2007," the firm predicts.

This would not be the first time Microsoft pushed back its release data, Gartner analyst Michael Silver told NewsFactor. For example, the much-ballyhooed unified file system that will be part of Longhorn’s flagship product first was meant to be part of a release called "Blackcomb," which was planned for this year.

In fact, Silver says, many of the new features in Longhorn are slideware and subject to change.

On paper, Longhorn certainly is looking exciting with a wealth of increased productivity enhancements. The principal upgrade is WinFS, a file system that ties together the broad array of Windows applications and is compatible with earlier systems, Yankee Group analyst Laura DiDio told NewsFactor. It would be a significant enhancement, analysts say, because it would offer a seamless transition to Longhorn while allowing the new OS to work with older Windows systems.

It is difficult to speculate on what Microsoft might be planning for Windows XP. Guesses range from a high-energy marketing campaign to a new release with glitzy add-ons, possibly available for free.

The appearance of adding significant value will be essential to keeping Microsoft’s user base happy. Gartner estimates that large enterprises have

enrolled 20-25 million seats in its EAs.

"The cost for the client-OS component is approximately (US)$42.50 to $54 per PC per year on a newly signed EA, and $26.35 to $33.50 on an EA renewal," Gartner says in a recent research note. "All of the products contained within an EA are covered under Microsoft's software-assurance program, which gives customers the right to run new versions of the applications on their PCs."

Microsoft came out with this licensing program about two years ago, Gartner research analyst Alvin Park told NewsFactor. And given the relatively long period between releases, it has become a significant revenue stream.

Last September, Microsoft added more components to its SA, in some part to still client unrest over the matter. These enhancements included the addition of WinPE for PC deployment, home-use rights, corporate error reporting, and training and support benefits, Gartner says. However, "we believe that most enterprises that signed up for SA perceived the primary value of SA to be upgrade protection, and most expected to get a new version of each product during the term of their contract," the firm maintains.

Given the costs plowed into those agreements, 2006 no doubt is looking awfully far away for this particular user population.

Japanese Officials Raid Microsoft Offices

Eight officials from Japan's Fair Trade Commission entered the Japan's offices of Microsoft Thursday morning as part of an investigation into possible anti-competitive practices by the U.S. software giant, the company confirms.

"The FTC officials are conducting an investigation regarding provisions in Microsoft licenses with PC manufacturers," says Aki Araki, a Microsoft Japan spokesperson. "We are confident that our practices are consistent with Japanese law."

A team from Microsoft is continuing to help the FTC officials with their investigations, Araki says.

Microsoft has allegedly forced Japanese PC makers to accept a contractual clause stipulating that they can't bring a case to court even if the software giant's technologies are very similar to those developed by Japanese firms, the Kyodo news agency reported Thursday, citing sources close to the action.

Microsoft licenses its patented software - most crucially the Windows operating system - to PC manufacturers. Previous probes in the U.S. and Europe have focused on whether Microsoft illegally maintains its monopoly in PC operating systems through restrictive licensing agreements with PC makers.

Local media sources quoted unnamed officials as saying that the current investigation focuses on the licensing for Windows XP. In 1998, Microsoft was warned by the FTC to stop engaging in anti-competitive business practices, but the company escaped punishment.

Japan is the world’s third-largest market for PCs after the U.S. and China.

Feds Serve Warrants at ITT Tech Campuses

Federal agents on Wednesday searched the headquarters of ITT Technical Institutes and some campuses of its chain of technical schools in eight states. Shares of its parent company, ITT Educational Services Inc., plunged 33 percent.

ITT Educational Services said the investigation involved grand jury subpoenas of records concerning student placement, retention, graduation, attendance, recruitment, grades, graduates’ salaries and tranfers of students’ credits to other colleges.

Law enforcement officers did not allow students, staff and faculty to enter about 10 of ITT’s 77 campuses in 30 states, ITT spokeswoman Nancy Brown said.

Classes elsewhere were unaffected, and ITT hoped to resume all classes Thursday, she said.

"They’ve given us no idea specifically what they’re looking for," said Brown, who was shut out of her offices in the 150-employee headquarters in Carmel. "They told us they believed we’d be back in our offices tomorrow (Thursday). It’s difficult, because no assurances have been given."

About 68 percent of the company’s 2003 revenue of nearly $523 million came indirectly from federal education aid programs, according to a company regulatory filing. And most ITT students pay a substantial portion of their tuition and other expenses with money received under federal programs.

Brown said she did not know whether the federal aid was the focus of the probe.

Rene R. Champagne, the Indianapolis-based company’s chairman and chief executive, said in a prepared statement that the company was cooperating with investigators.

"We have not been informed of any specific allegations or charges at this time," he said.

The U.S. Attorney’s Office in Houston, which was leading the investigation, issued a statement by U.S. Attorney Michael Shelby saying "no conclusions should be drawn from today’s activity."

Shelby said law enforcement officers were investigating at ITT’s headquarters and at campuses in Indiana, Texas, Virginia, Florida, Louisiana, Nevada, California and Oregon.

ITT’s Brown and federal authorities declined to say in which cities the campuses that were searched are located. Brown said investigators did not tell the company why the search involved only some ITT schools.

At ITT’s 1,300-student Indianapolis campus, arriving students, staff and faculty were greeted by law enforcement authorities as federal postal inspectors searched inside buildings. Students were turned away, and faculty and staff were questioned and asked to fill out forms and share

contact information.

ITT operates schools in 30 states and provides postsecondary, year-round courses to about 37,000 students, according to the company's annual regulatory filing. The company, which employs about 3,000, began operations in 1969, and offers courses primarily leading to associate's and bachelor's degrees with an emphasis on technical fields. Study programs vary from campus to campus. The company began offering online education in 2001.

Openwave to Put MSN Hotmail, Messaging on Phones

Microsoft Corp. said on Tuesday that Openwave Systems Inc., a maker of software for cell phones, would begin offering a feature allowing mobile phone users to access Hotmail and MSN Messenger while on the go.

The world's largest software maker said that it had joined with Openwave to jointly develop software to be featured on the smaller company's latest version of specialized software for cell phones.

Both companies declined to say how soon Hotmail and messaging would be available to users. They said the decision to offer such features was in the hands of wireless network operators. The new software platform, called Openwave Phone Suite V7 Platform, will be offered beginning in March.

"This really does introduce a much richer concept of messaging to the mobile user," said Don Listwin, chief executive of Openwave.

Microsoft has been developing software for mobile phones and devices for the past several years, pitting it against companies such as Symbian and Finland's Nokia, but has chiefly marketing its software to handset makers and operators as a high-end business tool.

Although access to Hotmail and other e-mail systems has long-been available to mobile phone users through software provided by companies such as Openwave, the deal extends such capabilities to a wider range of phone models.

Brian Arbogast, a vice president at Microsoft's MSN Internet division, said many current data-enabled cell phones would be able to access Hotmail and messenger.

Such phones would also be able to alert other users of MSN Messenger to detect whether a cell phone user was online and able to receive messages, a feature that is currently limited to higher-end cell phones and handheld computers.

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